

South Somerset District Council

Settlement Profile: Somerton

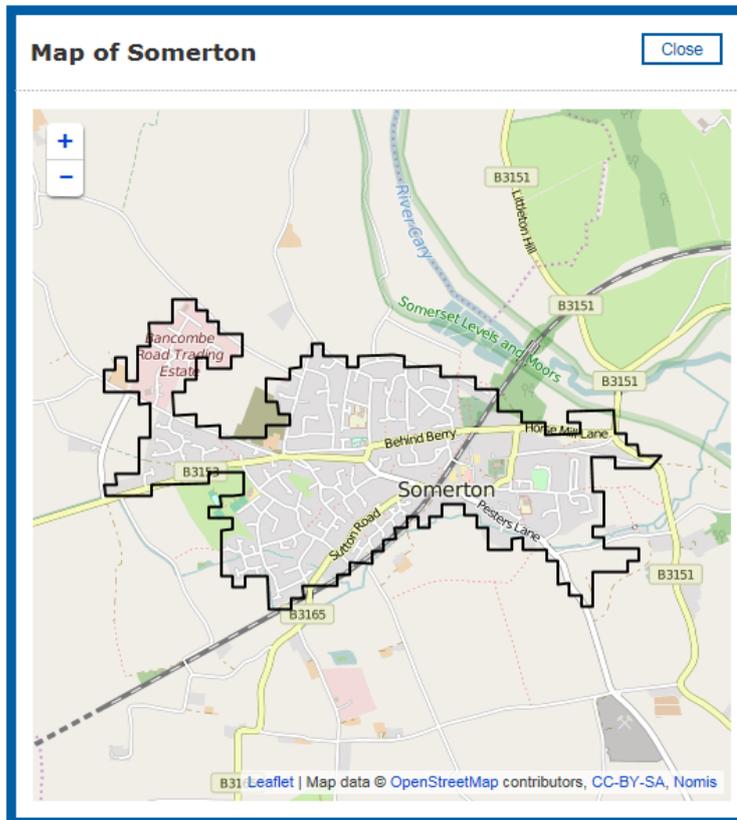


October 2017

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. The Settlement Profile has been produced using 2011 Census data for the 'Built-up Area' (BUA) of Somerton (Figure 1.1), unless otherwise stated.

Figure 1.1: Map of Somerton BUA



Source: Partnership Intelligence Unit, Somerset County Council

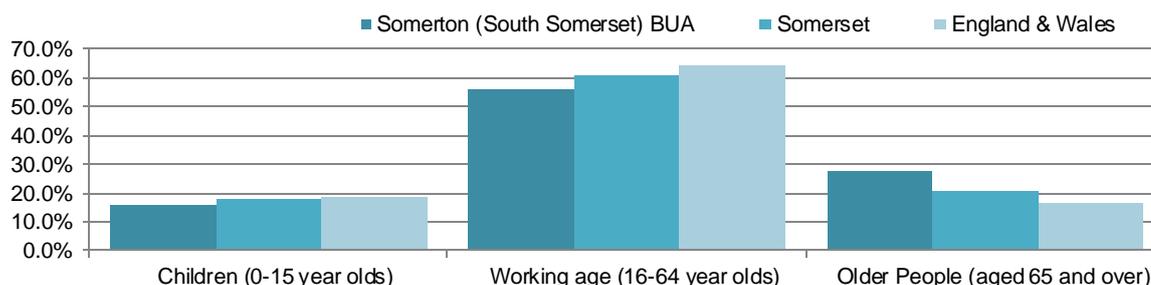
- 1.2. Somerton is a Local Market Town located in the north of the district, approximately 4.5 miles to the east of Langport, and equidistant to the north-west of the Podimore roundabout with the A303, A37, and A372.

2. POPULATION

- 2.1 Figure 2.1 shows the age profile of Somerton's resident population, assessing the number and percentage of residents in each of the following groups: children; working age; and older people. It then compares the percentages against those for Somerset, and England & Wales.

Figure 2.1 Somerton's Age Profile Compared to Somerset, and England & Wales

	Somerton BUA		Somerset	England & Wales
		%	%	%
Total usually resident population	4,339	100.0	100.0	100.0
Children (0-15 year olds)	704	16.2	17.8	18.9
Working age (16-64 year olds)	2,429	56.0	61.1	64.7
Older People (aged 65 and over)	1,206	27.8	21.1	16.4



Source: Partnership Intelligence Unit, Somerset County Council, using 2011 Census statistics from ONS

2.2 Figure 2.1 shows that Somerton has a resident population of 4,339 people, with proportionately fewer children and people of 'Working age', and more 'Older People' than Somerset, and England & Wales.

2.3 Somerton has an elderly population which is likely to result in pressure on services for the elderly.

3. HOUSING

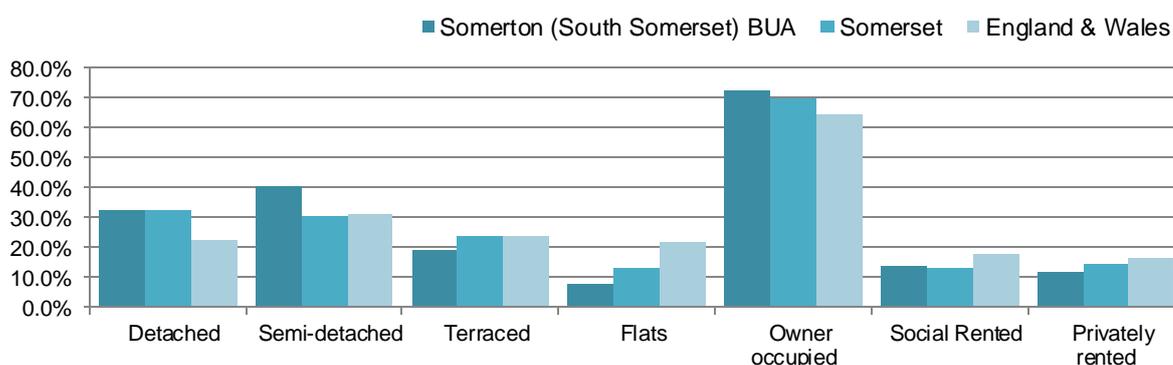
3.1 Policy SS5 sets Somerton a target of delivering 374 new dwellings by 31st March 2028; the same as the other Local Market Towns, and a direction of growth identified to the north of the settlement (Policy LMT 3). Between 1st April 2006 and 31st March 2017, it had delivered 108 dwellings and had 366 commitments¹. It therefore has potential to meet and exceed its target.

3.2 Figure 3.1 shows the number and percentage of dwellings by dwelling type and households by tenure. It also presents a comparison of dwelling types and tenure profiles for Somerton, Somerset, and England & Wales.

¹ South Somerset District Council Monitoring Database

Figure 3.1: Somerton's Accommodation and Household Profiles Compared to Somerset, and England & Wales

	Somerton BUA		Somerset	England & Wales
		%	%	%
Total number of dwellings	2,065	100.0	100.0	100.0
Detached	673	32.6	32.3	22.6
Semi-detached	832	40.3	30.4	31.1
Terraced	394	19.1	23.7	23.6
Flats	165	8.0	13.0	21.6
Tenure		%	%	%
Total number of households	1,989	100.0	100.0	100.0
Owner occupied	1,439	72.3	70.2	64.3
Social Rented	278	14.0	13.5	17.6
Privately rented	233	11.7	14.7	16.7
Average household size (persons per household)	2.2			



Source: Partnership Intelligence Unit, Somerset County Council, using 2011 Census statistics from ONS

3.3 Figure 3.1 shows that Somerton has the highest proportion of semi-detached properties, and a similar number of detached properties to Somerset, both of which are significantly above the proportion in England & Wales. The settlement has the lowest proportion of terraced properties and flats so would benefit from more housing types at the affordable end of the market.

3.4 Somerton's tenure is dominated by owner-occupied properties, even more so than Somerset and England & Wales. The proportion of private rented accommodation is below the Somerset and the English & Welsh levels. The proportion of social housing is above that for Somerset but below the English & Welsh average. The need for affordable housing though is not specific to Somerton, but a national issue.

4. ECONOMY

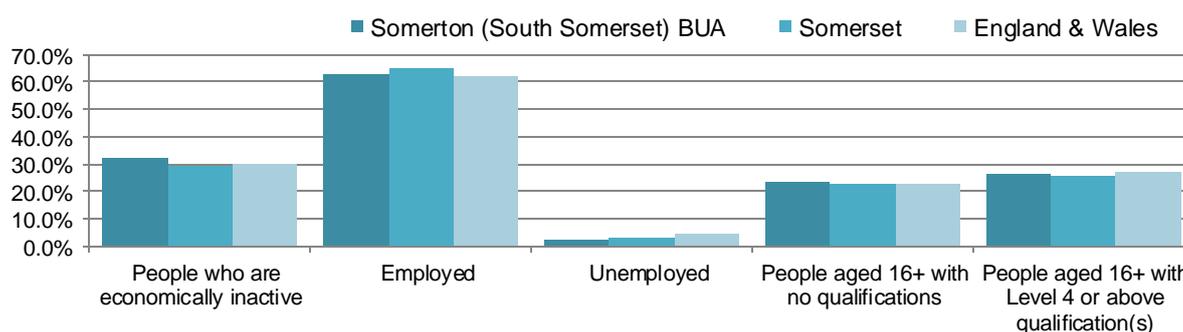
4.1 As Figure 4.1 shows, the proportion of economically inactive people exceeds the Somerset and the English & Welsh averages. However the proportion of unemployed people is very low, at 2%, and as such below its two comparators. The proportion of people employed is above the English & Welsh averages but below the

Somerset average. The low levels of unemployment and above national average levels of employment suggest the town is in a strong economic position, however the high levels of economic inactivity must also be considered; therefore it appears that the town is in a moderately strong position, economically.

- 4.2 The percentage of residents who have attained a level 4 qualification in Somerton is higher than Somerset but below England & Wales. The proportion of residents with no qualifications is above both comparators.

Figure 4.1: Somerton’s Economic Activity Compared to Somerset, and England & Wales

	Somerton BUA		Somerset	England & Wales
		%	%	%
Total number of people aged 16 to 74	3,035	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
People who are economically inactive	984	32.4%	29.2%	30.3%
Employed	1,907	62.8%	65.2%	61.9%
Unemployed	60	2.0%	3.0%	4.4%
People aged 16+ with no qualifications	841	23.1%	22.4%	22.7%
People aged 16+ with Level 4 or above qualification(s)	956	26.3%	25.6%	27.2%



Source: Partnership Intelligence Unit, Somerset County Council, using 2011 Census statistics from ONS

- 4.3 The main employment area in Somerton is the Bancombe Trading Estate, to the north-west of the town. The Badgers Cross industrial estate is outside of Somerton’s boundaries, falling in the ‘rest of district’ area for monitoring purposes.
- 4.4 The SSDC Monitoring Data base shows that Somerton has delivered 2.31 hectares of land (gross) and 14,991 sq. metres of floorspace (gross). Losses have reduced these gross figures to 1.17 hectares of land (net) and 9,664 sq. metres floorspace (net) since 2006/7. The settlement is not on track to achieve its economic land growth Local Plan target of 6.63 hectares.
- 4.5 Most of the land and floorspace delivered in Somerton can be attributed to the expansion of the Bancombe Road Trading Estate. However, delivery since 2007/8 has been limited.

- 4.6 Figure 4.2 shows the employment provision for Somerton in terms of the number of jobs and the percentage in 18 industry groups, compared to the percentage distribution in South Somerset.

Figure 4.2: Employment Provision in Somerton, 2015

Sector	Somerton		South Somerset
	No. of Jobs	%	%
1 : Agriculture, forestry & fishing (A)	0	0.0	n/a
2 : Mining, quarrying & utilities (B,D and E)	0	0.0	0.9
3 : Manufacturing (C)	205	13.7	20.3
4 : Construction (F)	135	9.0	5.5
5 : Motor trades (Part G)	50	3.3	(All G) 22.6
6 : Wholesale (Part G)	150	10.0	
7 : Retail (Part G)	140	9.3	
8 : Transport & storage (inc postal) (H)	20	1.3	3.5
9 : Accommodation & food services (I)	140	9.3	6.2
10 : Information & communication (J)	40	2.7	2
11 : Financial & insurance (K)	110	7.3	0.9
12 : Property (L)	15	1.0	1.4
13 : Professional, scientific & technical (M)	140	9.3	7
14 : Business administration & support services (N)	50	3.3	5.5
15 : Public administration & defence (O)	60	4.0	2.3
16 : Education (P)	80	5.3	7.8
17 : Health (Q)	100	6.7	14.1
18 : Arts, entertainment, recreation & other services (R,S,T and U)	40	2.7	3.9
Total	1,500		

Source: Business Register and Employment Survey, NOMIS, 2015

The BRES data does not include farmagriculture (SIC subclass 01000).data at settlement level; it is only available at region and country level. This is Open Access data that has been rounded to make it publishable; as such, the figures do not tally to an exact 100%. Somerton is comprised of Super Output Areas E01029225 and E01029226.

- 4.7 Of the 18 sectors, the primary employer within the settlement is manufacturing (13.7%), though at a much lower proportion to the South Somerset average. The second largest employment sector is Wholesale (10.0%), with Retail, Public administration & defence, and Accommodation & food services in joint third (9.3%). It is noteworthy that of the 0.9% sector share in Financial and Insurance employment in the district, Somerton has a share of 7.3, roughly 660% greater than the district average.
- 4.8 The settlement provides around 1,500 jobs, meaning that for every resident aged 16 to 74, the settlement provides close to 50% of a job, noticeably less than the 1,907 residents in Somerton who are employed. This below the ratio for the other market towns.

- 4.9 There are a range of small shops that meet the day-to-day needs of local residents. Other key services include a library, doctor's surgery, banks, and an infant and junior school.

Town Centre

- 4.10 The Retail and Main Town Centre Uses Study² identifies that the centre has a reasonable range of comparison units. At the time of the Study, this offer included four clothes shops, a pharmacy, gift shop, stationary shop, kitchenware shop, and a florist. There are a large number of charity shops and second hand/antique shops. The only multiple retailer is Boots Pharmacy.
- 4.11 There is no national supermarket within the town centre or elsewhere within the settlement. However, there is the independent Williams Supermarket located in the Brunel Shopping Centre. The convenience offer is mainly limited to smaller shops.
- 4.12 Service uses comprise several hairdressers, three estate agents, three accountants, a solicitor, and a bank. Evening uses are limited to two restaurants, three public houses and three takeaways.
- 4.13 Somerton has a vacancy rate of 18.9%, significantly above the national average, and in the recent past, facilities and businesses have moved from the town centre to the Bancombe Trading Estate, compounding this issue.
- 4.14 As Figure 4.3 shows, the Study projects that Somerton will have an expenditure surplus. Given the high vacancy rate, this projected capacity should be first satisfied through the reoccupation of vacant units.

Figure 4.3: Projected Retail Floorspace Capacity in Somerton

Type	Additional Floorspace (Square Metres) (Gross)		
	By 2024	By 2029	By 2034
Convenience	278	305	331
Comparison	62	146	232
Food and Beverage	45	136	225
Total	385	587	788

Source: South Somerset Retail and Main Town Centre Uses Study, 2017

² South Somerset Retail and Main Town Centres Uses Study

5. INFRASTRUCTURE

- 5.1 The IDP³ states that the growth proposed for Somerton in the Local Plan is unlikely to result in abnormal or fundamental infrastructure constraints relating to telecommunications, waste and recycling, education, health care, and emergency services.
- 5.2 New housing will generate a need for additional open space and outdoor play space, sports, community and cultural facilities; although the timing of those facilities is not fundamental to delivering development.
- 5.3 An infrastructural priority for Somerton is the provision of new junction arrangements to access the Northfield Farm site on Bancombe Road and Langport Road. Encouragingly, the creation of the access site now has granted planning permission as part of a scheme for residential development.

6. TRAVEL

- 6.1 How the residents of a settlement travel is an indication of its sustainability.
- 6.2 The settlement's public transport provision is shown in Figure 6.1 below.

Figure 6.1: Public Transport Provision

Buses		
Operator	Principal Destinations	Frequency (approx.)
Buses of Somerset	54: Taunton – Yeovil (via Fivehead, Curry Rivel, Langport, and Ilchester)	Hourly
	77: Yeovil – Wells (via Ilchester, Somerton, Street, Glastonbury)	Hourly

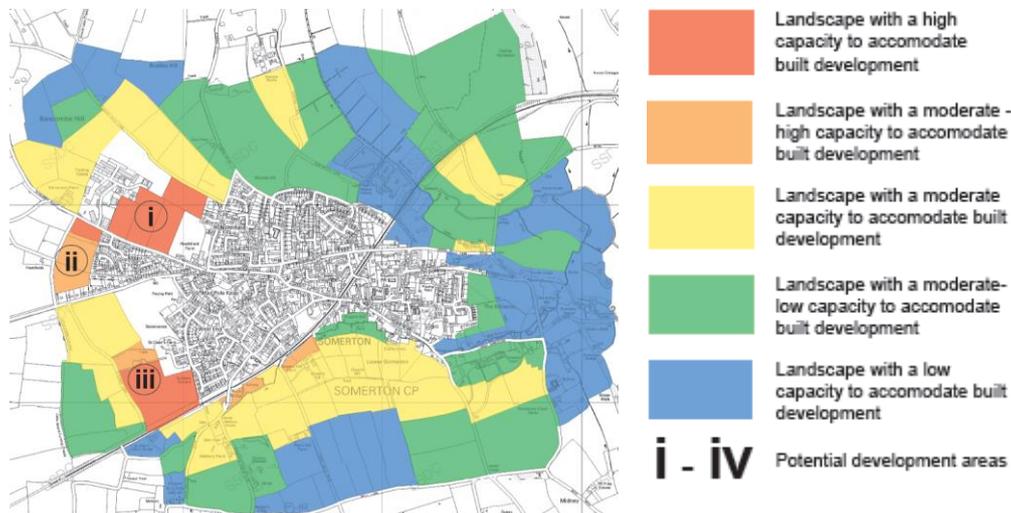
- 6.3 The nearest train station to Somerton is Castle Cary, approximately 10.5 miles away. However the existing car park at Castle Cary is at capacity and the expansion of this has been identified in the IDP.
- 6.4 For a Local Market Town, Somerton is comparatively well served by bus services that travel to primary destinations (e.g. Yeovil, Taunton, Street, and Glastonbury). However links from the rural hinterland into Somerton are not good.
- 6.5 Although it would arguably benefit from closer proximity to a train station, it remains to be seen that a station at either Langport or Somerton would make business sense or gain support from the rail infrastructure provider or train operator.

³ South Somerset Infrastructure Delivery Plan Update 2015/16 Part One – Spatial Summary
https://www.southsomerset.gov.uk/media/814403/idp_2015_16_part_1_issue.pdf

7. ENVIRONMENT

7.1 The Peripheral Landscape Study⁴ shows that the west of the settlement has the most potential for settlement growth, from a landscape standpoint.

Figure 7.1: Somerton Landscape Capacity



Source: Peripheral Landscape Study (2008)

7.2 Whilst landscape potential is important, other factors and constraints are also necessary to understanding the growth potential of the settlement.

7.3 Best and Most Versatile (BMV) land (Grades 1, 2 & 3a)⁵, is a key environmental constraint, according to the NPPF⁶. Loss of BMV will have to be considered as part of the planning balance for future growth. BMV agricultural land around the settlement is fairly limited, with only a handful of sites.

Figure 7.2: BMV Land around Somerton



Source: WebMap, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food Data

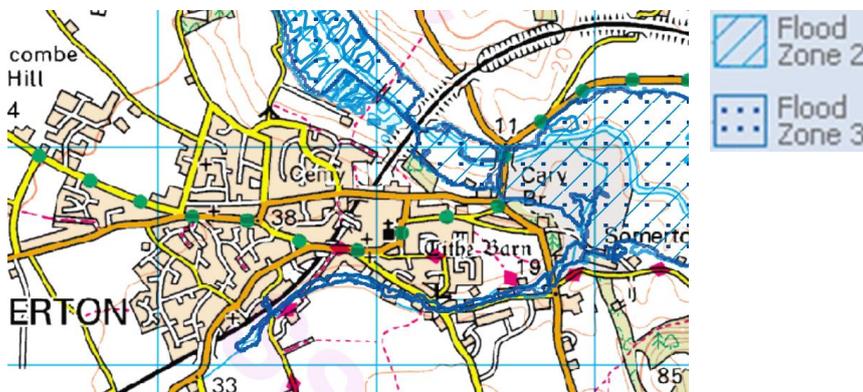
⁴ Peripheral Landscape Assessment, March 2008: <https://www.southsomerset.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/evidence-base/district-wide-documents/peripheral-landscape-studies/>

⁵ Defined in the NPPF, (DCLG) 2012 – Annex 2

⁶ DCLG, 2012

7.4 Another environmental constraint for Somerton's growth is flood risk, shown below in Figure 7.3.

Figure 7.3: Somerton Flood Map (Flood Zones 2 and 3)



Source: Environment Agency data on WebMap

- 7.5 As Figure 7.3 shows, Flood Zones 2 and 3 run across the north and east of the settlement, with a thin strip running along the south also.
- 7.6 There is ancient woodland to the east of the settlement, and a ribbon of RSPB consultation land which follows the run of the River Cary, to the north of the settlement. There are a few wildlife sites, including a couple following the river, a large site within the ancient woodland to the east, and a site to the north-west at Bancombe Hill.
- 7.7 There are many archaeological sites in and on the edge of the settlement.

8. CONCLUSION

8.1 Somerton's ability to accommodate future growth is considered to be moderately strong as the town has services and facilities to support a larger population, and there appears to be developable land for housing and employment. An increased population would support the vitality of the town, but additional employment must also be provided to address the limited job density.

Key Issues

- 8.2 Looking towards the future it is considered that the key issues Somerset are:
- A high retail vacancy rate in the town centre
 - Limited provision of jobs relative to the population aged 16-74
 - Very limited employment land growth in recent years
 - A limited proportion of property types at the more affordable end of the scale